

# Nontraditional Jobs: MYTH VS. FACT

**H**ow often have you jumped into a taxi and found a woman at the wheel? Have you ever been on a commercial flight piloted by a woman? When you've had a leaky faucet, was it fixed by Mark or Marcia? Even though the last few decades have brought great advances for women in the United States, occupational segregation is still a prominent feature of the national labor market. Women have made some breakthroughs in professional, male-dominated jobs, but have made very few gains in non-traditional blue-collar occupations.

Why is occupational segregation an important issue? As stated in other articles of this publication, women, on average, earn less than men, and much of that gender wage disparity can be explained by the different occupations in which men and women are employed. Many occupations that are traditionally held by men are high-wage, high-growth jobs—jobs that could be of significant advantage to single moms or other women who are the primary income source for their households.

If nontraditional occupations are high-paying and have great growth potential, why have women shied away from them? Attitudes about “men’s work” are the most likely reason. But rest assured, these beliefs are mainly the result of tradition and socialization and not because of sex-related job requirements. Socialization is also the most likely reason why we see women over-represented in “pink collar” professions such as nursing, school teaching, and administrative support services. While these are all very rewarding and viable occupations, many pink-collar jobs tend to pay lower-than-average wages and offer fewer benefits and full-time positions.

What exactly is a nontraditional occupation for a woman? The U.S. Department of Labor specifically defines it to be an occupation in which women comprise 25 percent or less of total employment. From a national standpoint, those occupations include architects, truck drivers, aircraft pilots, construction occupations and auto mechanics. In Utah, wages for these occupations are all above the state-wide median hourly wage of \$13.46.

By Carrie Mayne



## Utah Wages For Select Nontraditional Jobs

Job	Median Hourly Wage
Statewide Overall	\$13.46
Architects	33.03
Truck drivers	16.97
Electricians	19.12
Carpenters	15.39
Plumbers	20.83
Construction Managers	33.82
Automotive Mechanics	15.20

Source: Utah Department of Workforce Services, 2006 OES Wages

It is certainly true that in this day and age a woman is more likely than she was 20 or 30 years ago be a part of the workforce at some point in her life, whether it is by choice or necessity due to divorce, parenthood, or a spouse losing his job. Women need to be prepared for the workforce, and the most powerful tool in choosing a career is knowledge. Knowing that nontraditional jobs are viable and lucrative options is just one more piece of information to help women make those important career decisions.

The following is a list of commonly held beliefs regarding women in nontraditional jobs, along with an explanation of the reality of these occupations:

**MYTH:** These jobs are dirty!

**FACT:** While it is true that some nontraditional occupations will involve getting a little grease under your fingernails, techno-

logical changes have cleaned up many of these occupations. For example, auto mechanics are just as likely to be seen working on a computer as they would be under the hood of a car! (Many traditional female jobs are pretty dirty, too.)

**MYTH:** The “good ol’ boys network” will keep me from getting a job in a “man’s occupation.”

**FACT:** Times have certainly changed and many women have broken through the glass ceilings that used to impede their entry and advancement in the workforce. Today, women are generally more widely accepted in the workforce and people are used to having female coworkers. Additionally, employers are starting to understand the benefits of a diversified workforce. If necessary, you do have law on your side to ensure you have just as much of a chance at that job as your male counterpart. Title VII of the Civil Rights Act

of 1964 prohibits employment discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin.

**MYTH:** I won’t get paid as much as a guy for doing the same job.

**FACT:** The Equal Pay Act of 1963 (EPA) protects men and women who perform substantially equal work in the same establishment from sex-based wage discrimination. Again, the law is on your side.

**MYTH:** I won’t be respected or taken seriously.

**FACT:** It is true that women in any occupation struggle sometimes to have their abilities recognized, and it could be especially difficult if you are one of only a handful of women in that line of work. However, your coworkers are human beings just like you, and in time if you prove yourself you are sure to win the respect of those who deserve yours in return.

